

## **Baiin Tea House**

The name of the Baiin tea house invokes plum trees, which are considered an auspicious symbol because they bloom before other plants, heralding the coming of spring. Baiin contains a re-creation of a small historic tea room in the style favored by Sen no Sotan (1578–1658), the third-generation head of the Sen family of tea masters. Sotan was the grandson of Sen no Rikyu (1522–1591), a famous tea master known for his profound influence on the development of the Japanese culture of tea (*chanoyu*).

Usually guests enter a tea house directly from the outside, but visitors to Baiin first walk through a covered passageway enclosed by earthen walls and lined with stepping stones. The compact four-and-a-half-tatami-mat tea room just inside was constructed based on building plans of Sen no Sotan's original. There is a larger tea room in the rear and a preparation space between the two. The thatched roof, earthen walls, and tokonoma alcove pillar made from roughly hewn chestnut create an impression of simple, natural beauty, reflecting the *wabi-sabi* aesthetics prized by practitioners of *chanoyu*.

Near the tea house is a *suikinkutsu*, a traditional musical garden feature. An upturned pot with an opening in the bottom is buried in front of the stone water basin. When water from the basin drips into the pot, it creates soft, musical splashes, often compared to a bell or a *koto* zither. Visitors can listen to the sounds through the bamboo tube inserted into the ground beside the water basin.